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ABSTRACT

The Austin (Texas) Independent School District (AISD) required that all students who graduated in 1985-86 and previous years have skills in reading and mathematics equivalent to ninth-grade level or above. Special education students who could not be validly tested were exempted from the requirements. Students who had not met the requirements could graduate if their parents signed a letter of waiver. This report describes the impact of these requirements on students. The major positive findings were: (1) of the 3,195 high school graduates in 1985-86, the percentage who met the district's minimum competency requirement was 91 percent in reading, 93 percent in mathematics, and 90 percent in both reading and mathematics; (2) students in grade 11 performed well on the first administrations of the Exit-level Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS), with 92 percent meeting state requirements in language arts and 90 percent in mathematics; and (3) AISD's minimum competency requirements apparently have had a positive effect on student achievement. Compared to 1977-78, a higher percentage of seniors has demonstrated competency at or above the 8.5 grade equivalent every year. Also, compared to 1981-82, a higher percentage of seniors has demonstrated competency at or above the 9.0 grade equivalent every year. Starting in 1986-87, AISD minimum competency requirements will be replaced by the Exit-level TEAMS. Students may be denied a diploma as a result of not passing Exit-level TEAMS. (Author/MDE)

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Minimum Competency for Graduation

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Austin Independent School District 1985-86

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS

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The Austin Independent School District required that all students who graduated in 1985-86 and previous years have skills in reading and mathematics equivalent to a ninth-grade level or above. Special education students who could not be validly tested were exempt from the requirements. Students who had not met the requirements could graduate if their parents signed a letter of waiver. This report describes the impact of these requirements on students. In 1986-87 and future years, students will be required to meet the State's minimum competency levels on the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) in order to graduate.

Major Positive Findings:

1. Of the 3,195 high school graduates in 1985-86, the percentage who met AISD's minimum competency requirement was...

   - 91% in reading,
   - 93% in mathematics, and
   - 90% in both reading and mathematics.

2. Students in the eleventh grade in 1985-86 performed well on the first administrations of the Exit-Level TEAMS, with 92% meeting the State minimum competency level in language arts, and 90% in mathematics.

3. Over the period of eight years (since 1978-79) of requiring students to demonstrate a minimum level of competency in reading and mathematics, AISD's requirements apparently have had a positive effect on student achievement.

Major Findings Requiring Action:

1. While AISD students performed well on the first administrations of the Exit-Level TEAMS, the criteria for mastering subsequent versions of the test will be more difficult. AISD staff will be challenged to prepare students to pass the test in future years.

2. Over the past several years, a significant number of graduates signed a waiver letter without taking the tutorial course. If students failing their initial administration of the Exit-Level TEAMS are not provided with remediation, the District will be in violation of State law.

WHAT WERE THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION?

To graduate from an Austin ISD high school in 1985-86 or previous years, a student must have demonstrated reading and mathematics competencies equivalent to average achievement at the beginning of ninth grade (9.0 grade equivalent). If this minimum competency level was not achieved, a letter of waiver, which stated that the student understood that competency standards had not been met, must have been signed by the parent or guardian of the student. Tutorial courses in both reading and mathematics were provided to help students attain competency levels. To enroll in these tutorial courses, a student must have completed four semesters of reading/language arts or earned two units of credit (four semesters) in mathematics but had not met competency in the subject. At least one tutorial was required prior to signing a waiver letter, except for limited-English proficient (LEP) students whose English language proficiency was below the level required to benefit from the tutorial. Only special education students who could not be validly tested were exempt from these requirements. Prior to 1982-83, the minimum competency criterion was the 8.5 grade equivalent.

Because students enrolled in grade 11 in 1985-86 and thereafter must pass the State exit-level test (the TEAMS - Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills) in order to receive a diploma, in April, 1984 the School Board decided that AISD'S minimum competency requirements would apply only to students who graduate in 1985-86 or earlier.

Students who graduated in 1978-79 were the first to graduate under AISD's minimum competency requirements. The requirements and exemptions have undergone revisions and now, after eight years of impacting graduates, those requirements have expired. This is the final minimum competency report to the School Board, with a retrospective following on page 14.

The evaluation of the program has included administering tests, maintaining records, assessing procedures, and evaluating the impact of the requirements. Detailed minimum competency data are presented in the SYSTEMWIDE EVALUATION: 1985-86 Technical Report, publication number 85.66.

Students under AISD's minimum competency requirements could meet them as eighth graders on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), in grades 9-12 on the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress (STEP) (given prior to 1983-84) or the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP) (given beginning in 1983-84), or on the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS). Once each fall and once each spring, special administrations of Austin's Basic Educational Skills Test (Austin's BEST) were conducted on each campus. Austin's BEST was also administered during the final examination period in the tutorial courses.

HOW MANY 1985-86 GRADUATES MET THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION?

- Reading: 91% met the competency requirement.

  5% signed a letter of waiver.

  3% could not be tested validly because of a handicapping condition (special education).

- Mathematics: 93% met the competency requirement.

  4% signed a letter of waiver.

  3% could not be tested validly because of a handicapping condition (special education).

- 90% met competency requirements in both reading and mathematics.

	1982-83		1983-84		1984-85		1985-86	
Number of Graduates Who...	3408	100%	3152	100%	3191	100%	3195	100%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in Both Areas	3010	88%	2832	90%	2882	90%	2871	90%
Signed at Least One Letter	254	8%	186	6%	210	7%	216	7%
Used at Least One Sp. Ed. Exemption	146	4%	135	4%	99	3%	111	3%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in Reading	3046	89%	2862	91%	2910	91%	2918	91%
Signed a Letter in Reading	222	7%	162	5%	186	6%	172	5%
Used a Sp. Ed. Exemption in Reading	140	4%	128	4%	95	3%	105	3%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in Mathematics	3162	93%	2941	93%	2979	93%	2976	93%
Signed a Letter in Mathematics	105	3%	83	3%	117	4%	115	4%
Used a Sp. Ed. Exemption in Mathematics	141	4%	128	4%	95	3%	104	3%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in at Least One Area	3196	94%	2971	94%	3007	94%	3020	95%
Signed a Letter in Both Areas	73	2%	59	2%	93	3%	71	2%
Used a Sp. Ed. Exemption in Both Areas	137	4%	121	4%	91	3%	101	3%

Note: Some graduates were sp. ed. exempt in one area and signed a letter in the other area; consequently, the data may not add up exactly.

Figure 1. COMPETENCY OF GRADUATES, 1982-83 to 1984-85.

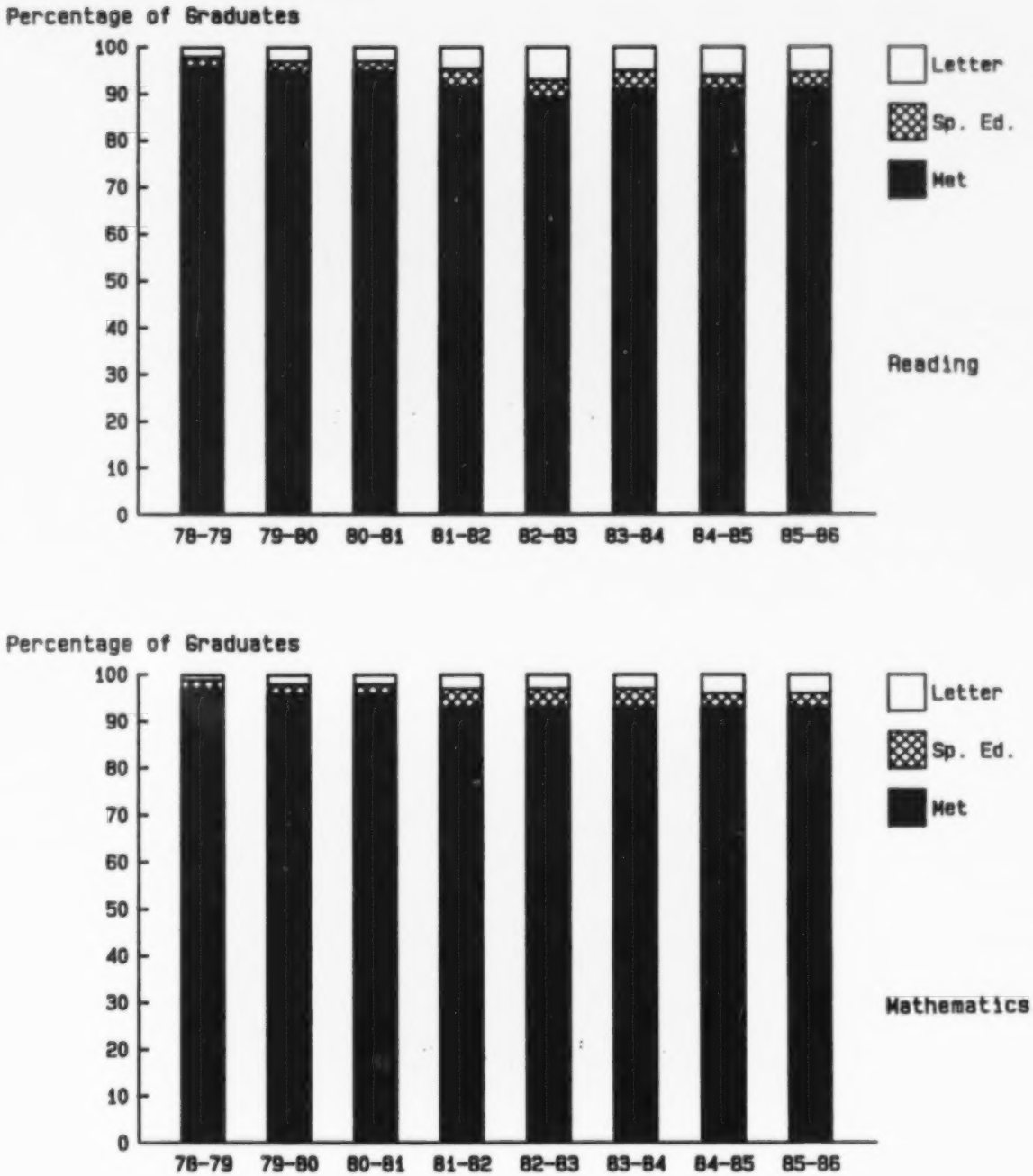
Of the 3,195 students who graduated during the 1985-86 school year, 2,871 (90%) met minimum competency requirements in both reading and mathematics. Those not meeting both requirements included special education students who were not testable (105, 3% in reading; 104, 3% in mathematics) and students signing a letter of waiver (172, 5% in reading; 115, 4% in mathematics).

A lower percentage of graduates signed letters of waiver while a higher percentage of graduates used special education exemptions in 1985-86 than in 1984-85.

- 0.4 percentage point fewer students signed a reading letter of waiver.
- 0.1 percentage point fewer students signed a mathematics letter of waiver.
- 0.4 percentage point more students used a special education exemption.

Figure 1 compares this year's graduates with those from the three previous years. (Figure 6 contains complete data for 1978-79 through 1985-86.) Figure 2 graphically presents the percentage of students meeting minimum competency requirements, signing letters of waiver, and using special education exemptions over the past six years. Figure 4 (pages 8 and 9) presents graduate data by school for the past six years. When interpreting all data relating to minimum competency, keep in mind that students graduating after 1981-82 had to meet the 9.0 rather than the 8.5 criterion.

Figure 2. COMPETENCY STATUS OF GRADUATES, 1978-79 TO 1985-86.



Note: Beginning in 1982-83, criterion was raised to 9.0.

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DID THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS HAVE ANY EFFECT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

- Compared to 1977-78 (before any competency requirements became effective), a higher percentage of seniors has demonstrated competency at or above the 8.5 grade equivalent every year.
- Compared to 1981-82 (the year before the 9.0 requirement became effective), a higher percentage of seniors has demonstrated competency at or above the 9.0 grade equivalent every year.

Test Results

If the minimum competency requirements have had an influence on student achievement, a decline in students in the lowest percentile ranges on the high school achievement test (the TAP beginning in 1983-84, the STEP prior to 1983-84) should be evident. Unfortunately, because the TAP and STEP are so dissimilar in many ways (i.e., norming procedures, norms available, and tests administered), no meaningful comparison of data can be made over the 8 years of testing. However, through 1982-83, there had been a small decline in the proportion of very low achievers in mathematics (as measured by the STEP) since the minimum competency requirements became effective. Low achievers in reading represented the same percentage of graduates in 1982-83 as they did in 1977-78.

When comparing performance on the 1985-86, 1984-85, and 1983-84 TAP, a positive trend is evident. In reading, the percentage of students scoring in the lowest quartile (at or below the 25th percentile) in 1985-86 ranged from one percentage point more to three percentage points less than the 1984-85 percentages at the same grade. In mathematics, the 1985-86 data ranged from zero to four percentage points less than in the previous year. (When comparing 1984-85 data to 1983-84 data, the percentage of students in the lowest quartile had decreased by four to seven percentage points in reading and one to four percentage points in mathematics.)

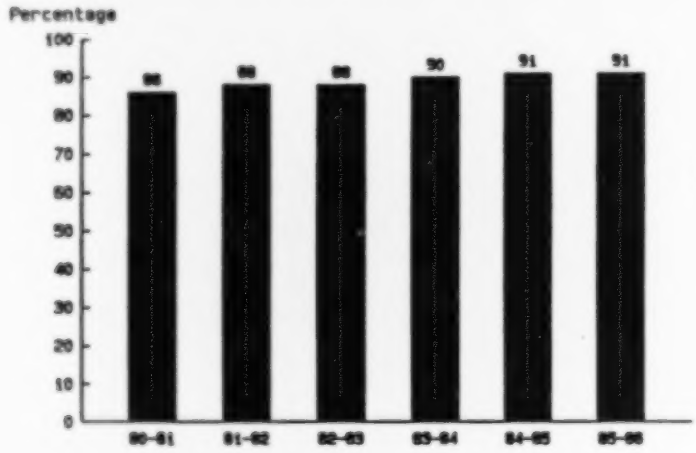
There has been an increase compared to 1977-78 (prior to any requirements) in the percentage of high school seniors (includes both graduates and other twelfth graders) who have demonstrated minimum competency skills at or above the 8.5 level prior to graduation. When the competency requirement was raised to 9.0 in 1982-83, more students began meeting that higher standard (see Figure 3). Over the period of eight years (since 1977-78) of requiring students to demonstrate a minimum level (8.5 or 9.0) of competency in reading and mathematics, AISD's requirements apparently have had a positive effect on student achievement. More students appear to meet a higher criterion when it affects their graduation status.

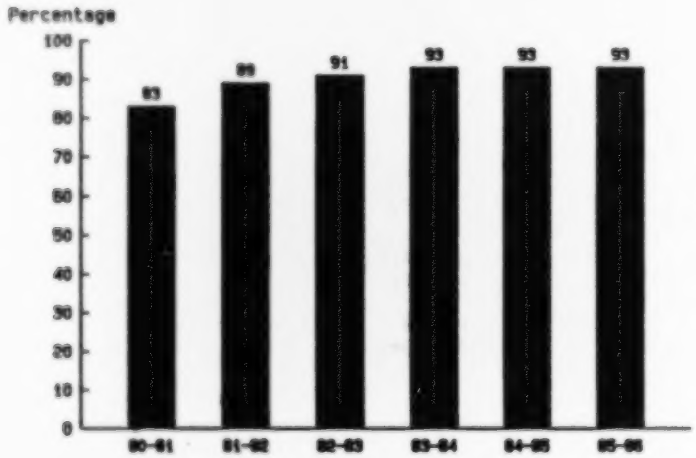
Two factors seem to have influenced these noticeable increases.

- Marginal students retake the competency tests multiple times, thus increasing their chances of making higher scores.
- Tutorial courses have offered instruction specific to the skills being measured by the competency tests.

As an outcome of this focused tutorial instruction, graduates do appear to have better mastery of a set of basic skills.

Figure 3. PERCENTAGE OF SENIORS MEETING THE 9.0 CRITERION, 1980-81 THROUGH 1985-86.





Note: Beginning in 1982-83, criterion was raised to 9.0.

85.60

	Year of Graduation	Total Number of Graduates	Graduates Meeting Both Reading and Math Competency #	%	Graduates Meeting Reading Competency #	%	Graduates Meeting Math Competency #	%
	78-79	12	12	100.0	12	100.0	12	100.0
	79-80	10	10	100.0	10	100.0	10	100.0
	80-81	15	15	100.0	15	100.0	15	100.0
ADULT	81-82	23	23	100.0	23	100.0	23	100.0
LEARNING	82-83	94	94	100.0	94	100.0	94	100.0
CENTER	83-84	78	78	100.0	78	100.0	78	100.0
	84-85	127	127	100.0	127	100.0	127	100.0
	85-86	160	160	100.0	160	100.0	160	100.0
	78-79	539	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	79-80	498	487	97.8	487	97.8	489	98.2
	80-81	398	375	94.2	377	94.7	384	96.5
	81-82	335	310	92.5	311	92.8	325	97.0
ANDERSON	82-83	334	299	89.5	301	90.1	314	94.0
	83-84	349	315	90.3	318	91.1	324	92.8
	84-85	359	343	95.5	345	96.1	346	96.4
	85-86	328	305	93.0	308	93.9	311	94.8
	78-79	364	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	79-80	397	392	98.7	393	99.0	393	99.0
	80-81	384	378	98.4	383	99.7	378	98.4
	81-82	345	331	95.9	333	96.5	335	97.1
AUSTIN	82-83	413	382	92.5	386	93.5	399	96.6
	83-84	303	280	92.4	282	93.1	288	95.0
	84-85	296	281	94.9	281	94.9	285	96.3
	85-86	285	268	94.0	271	95.1	271	95.1
	78-79	560	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	79-80	594	562	94.6	566	95.3	569	95.8
	80-81	526	507	96.4	509	96.8	510	97.0
	81-82	512	481	93.9	491	95.9	488	95.3
CROCKETT	82-83	538	492	91.4	496	92.2	508	94.4
	83-84	501	468	93.4	469	93.6	482	96.2
	84-85	478	442	92.5	444	92.9	457	95.6
	85-86	522	475	91.0	482	92.3	487	93.3
EVENING	84-85	4	2	50.0	2	50.0	2	50.0
SCHOOL	85-86	3	2	66.7	3	100.0	2	66.7
	78-79	333	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	79-80	345	315	91.3	319	92.5	326	94.5
	80-81	323	298	92.3	299	92.6	304	94.1
	81-82	294	264	89.8	269	91.5	276	93.9
LBJ	82-83	271	240	88.6	246	90.8	250	92.3
	83-84	285	264	92.6	269	94.4	267	93.7
	84-85	239	205	85.8	208	87.0	217	90.8
	85-86	222	197	88.7	202	91.0	206	92.8
	78-79	209	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	79-80	155	139	89.7	142	91.6	143	92.3
	80-81	267	243	91.0	252	94.4	249	93.3
	81-82	315	280	88.9	290	92.1	290	92.1
JOHNSTON	82-83	321	269	83.8	274	85.4	289	90.0
	83-84	326	287	88.0	290	89.0	298	91.4
	84-85	325	287	88.3	290	89.2	296	91.1
	85-86	357	326	91.3	328	91.9	338	94.7

Figure 4. GRADUATES MEETING READING AND MATHEMATICS MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS, BY SCHOOL, 1978-79 THROUGH 1985-86 (Part 1).

Note: 1982-83 and later graduates had to meet a 9.0 grade-equivalent criterion, compared to 8.5 for previous years.

NA = Data not available by school.

	Year of Graduation	Total Number of Graduates	Graduates Meeting Both Reading and Math Competency #	%	Graduates Meeting Reading Competency #	%	Graduates Meeting Math Competency #	%
	78-79	393	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	79-80	382	354	92.7	357	93.5	359	94.0
	80-81	341	320	93.8	324	95.0	323	94.7
	81-82	347	304	87.6	314	90.5	313	90.2
LANIER	82-83	358	309	86.3	313	87.4	326	91.1
	83-84	321	276	86.0	283	88.2	292	91.0
	84-85	374	338	90.4	343	91.7	349	93.3
	85-86	306	267	87.3	271	88.6	284	92.8
	78-79	319	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	79-80	332	310	93.4	312	94.0	323	97.3
	80-81	390	368	94.4	370	94.9	376	96.4
	81-82	319	288	90.3	291	91.2	295	92.5
MCCALLUM	82-83	310	286	92.3	290	93.5	295	95.2
	83-84	286	258	90.2	259	90.6	271	94.8
	84-85	289	262	90.7	268	92.7	274	94.8
	85-86	308	272	88.3	279	90.6	281	91.2
	78-79	339	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	79-80	333	302	90.7	308	92.5	315	94.6
	80-81	311	291	93.6	293	94.2	297	95.5
	81-82	329	283	86.0	287	87.2	304	92.4
REAGAN	82-83	329	281	85.4	286	86.9	296	90.0
	83-84	295	243	82.4	245	83.1	260	88.1
	84-85	269	235	87.4	237	88.1	247	91.8
	85-86	279	242	86.7	249	89.2	255	91.4
	80-81	1	1	100.0	1	100.0	1	100.0
	81-82	17	11	64.7	15	88.2	11	64.7
ROBBINS	82-83	21	18	85.7	18	85.7	19	90.5
	83-84	33	24	72.7	27	81.8	27	81.8
	84-85	27	23	85.2	24	88.9	24	88.9
	85-86	62	44	71.0	48	77.4	51	82.3
	78-79	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	79-80	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	80-81	11	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
SPECIAL	81-82	18	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
SCHOOLS*	82-83	17	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	83-84	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	84-85	25	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	85-86	11	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	78-79	323	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	79-80	340	315	92.6	320	94.1	322	94.7
	80-81	355	323	91.0	325	91.5	340	95.8
	81-82	379	333	87.9	336	88.7	358	94.5
TRAVIS	82-83	402	340	84.6	342	85.1	372	92.5
	83-84	375	339	90.4	342	91.2	355	94.7
	84-85	379	337	88.9	341	90.0	355	93.7
	85-86	352	310	88.1	317	90.1	330	93.8
	78-79	3391	3204	94.5	3260	96.1	3277	96.6
	79-80	3386	3186	94.1	3214	94.9	3249	96.0
	80-81	3322	3119	93.9	3148	94.8	3177	95.6
	81-82	3233	2908	89.9	2960	91.6	3018	93.3
TOTAL	82-83	3408	3010	88.3	3046	89.4	3162	92.8
	83-84	3152	2832	89.8	2862	90.8	2942	93.3
	84-85	3191	2882	90.4	2910	91.2	2979	93.4
	85-86	3195	2871	89.8	2918	91.3	2976	93.1

Figure 4. GRADUATES MEETING READING AND MATHEMATICS MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS, BY SCHOOL, 1978-79 THROUGH 1985-86 (Part 2).

*Prior to 1980-81, graduates of special schools were reported within regular high school populations. From 1980-81 through 1982-83, graduates of special schools (e.g., Mary Lee) were reported independently. Beginning in 1983-84, these results represent Clifton Center only. Other special schools are again reported within regular high school populations.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GRADUATES WHO SIGNED LETTERS OF WAIVER?

The 1985-86 graduates who signed letters of waiver had these characteristics.

1. Most graduates who signed waivers never took a tutorial course.

   - 110 in reading (64% of all students signing a reading waiver)
   - 108 in mathematics (94% of all students signing a mathematics waiver)

   (In future years, AISD will be in violation of State law unless students not mastering the Exit-Level TEAMS are provided with tutorial remediation.)

2. Of the 172 graduates who signed reading waivers, 26 (15%) had taken two or more reading tutorials. Of the 115 graduates who signed mathematics waivers, only one (0.9%) took more than one tutorial.

3. Of those who signed reading waivers, 72 (42%) were Black, 53 (31%) were Hispanic, and 47 (27%) were Anglo/Other. Of those who signed mathematics waivers, 49 (43%) were Black, 31 (27%) were Hispanic, and 35 (30%) were Anglo/Other.

4. More males than females signed waivers. Of the students who signed waivers in reading, 90 (52%) were male. In mathematics, 67 (58%) were male.

5. Graduates who signed waivers averaged about six months older than other graduates.

6. In reading, ten (6%) of those who signed waivers were classified as limited-English proficient (LEP) at the time of graduation. In mathematics, three (3%) were classified as LEP at graduation.

7. Of those students who signed a waiver in either area, the number who were in special education more than three hours per day was 42 (24%) in reading and 42 (37%) in mathematics.

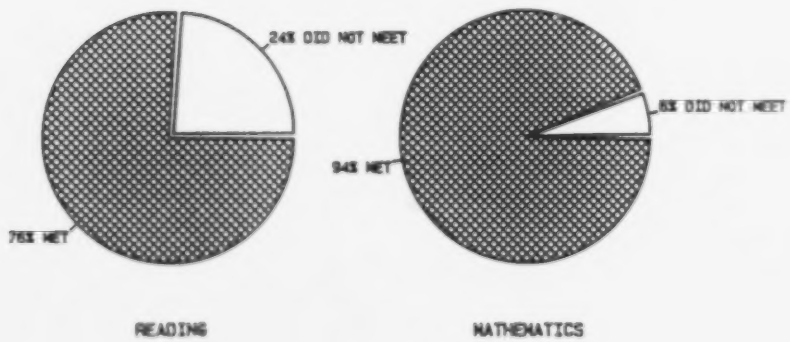
HOW SUCCESSFUL WERE THE TUTORIAL COURSES IN HELPING STUDENTS ATTAIN MINIMUM COMPETENCY LEVELS?

- Of the 1985-86 graduates who took at least one tutorial course, the percentage who met competency requirements prior to graduation was...
  - 76% in reading, and
  - 94% in mathematics.

The ultimate goal of the reading and mathematics tutorial courses is to bring every student up to (or above) the minimum competency level. Of the 1985-86 graduates, 6% took at least one tutorial prior to demonstrating competency in reading, compared to 3% in mathematics. The tutorial courses have played a role in the attainment of minimum competency levels by some graduates. However, even after taking at least one tutorial, some students never met the minimum competency requirements.

Overall, 76% of the 1985-86 graduates who took at least one reading tutorial met reading competency, as compared with 74% of the 1984-85 graduates. Of the 1985-86 graduates who took at least one mathematics tutorial, 94% met mathematics competency, as compared to 87% in 1984-85. Figure 5 illustrates the 1985-86 percentages. Given the high success rate of the mathematics tutorials and that 94% of those who signed waivers in mathematics never took the tutorial, it appears that the number who signed waivers could have been reduced substantially had they taken the tutorial.

Figure 5. PERCENTAGE OF 1985-86 GRADUATES TAKING AT LEAST ONE TUTORIAL WHO MET COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS.



WHAT CHANGES IN THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAM WERE MADE IN 1985-86?

Students who graduated in 1985-86 were the last students required to meet AISD's minimum competency requirements. As a result, several changes occurred.

Reading and mathematics tutorial courses (designed specifically to help prepare students to meet the requirements) were eliminated on most high school campuses. In some cases, those students whose competency status was marginal might have met minimum competency if the courses had been offered at all schools.

Another effect of the change in the number of tutorials being offered was a reduction in the number of times the minimum competency test (Austin's BEST) was administered. Previously, Austin's BEST had been administered on each campus three times during each semester (for senior transfer students, in a special session, and also as the final exam on the tutorial classes). In 1985-86, Austin's BEST was administered in most cases only once per semester on each campus. This reduction may have prevented some graduates from having as many opportunities to demonstrate competency as graduates have had in past years.

Students in grade 11 in 1985-86 or later years are required by law to pass the Exit-Level TEAMS in order to receive a diploma. The first administrations of the test occurred in 1985-86 (all eleventh graders were tested). Prior to the first testing (October, 1985), information about the test was widely disseminated and procedures were implemented (including the training of school staff) to facilitate a smooth administration districtwide. In addition, daily mini-lessons focusing on specific TEAMS Exit-Level objectives were instituted in all classes at all high schools to prepare students. AISD students (and staff) successfully met the challenge, with the District's performance being the highest among the eight Texas urban districts and above the statewide average. (For complete information, see The TEAMS Report: 1985-86, publication number 85.59.)

As an additional benefit, the TEAMS mini-lessons also provided extra tutorial help on basic skills for the 1985-86 graduates, perhaps helping some whose status was marginal to reach that ninth-grade minimum competency level.

WHAT CHANGES NEED TO BE MADE IN 1986-87?

- 1986-87 graduates will be the first students required to demonstrate mastery of the Exit-Level TEAMS.

With the expiration of AISD's minimum competency requirements, the District must focus its resources on preparing students to master the Exit-Level TEAMS. In 1986-87, for the first time, students may be denied a diploma as a result of not passing the Exit-Level TEAMS. State law does not allow students the option of signing a letter of waiver in lieu of meeting the requirements, as the AISD policy did.

Students in the eleventh grade in 1985-86 performed very well on the first administrations of the Exit-Level TEAMS, with 90% of all students tested in 1985-86 demonstrating mastery in mathematics and 92% in language arts. However, the mastery criteria used in 1985-86 were much easier than the criteria to be used in subsequent years. Teachers and administrators will be challenged to prepare students in later years to meet mastery with a higher score.

Because of inconsistencies that may occur in future years among the different versions of the Exit-Level TEAMS, the variance in test difficulty and other aspects must be closely monitored to assess accurately the effect of the inconsistencies on AISD students' meeting graduation competency.

Over the past several years, a significant number of graduates signed a waiver letter without taking the tutorial course. If students failing their initial administration of the Exit-Level TEAMS are not provided with remediation, the District will be in violation of State law. The progress of students must be closely monitored to ensure that this does not occur.

RETROSPECTIVE--AISD'S MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS

AISD's minimum competency requirements were set by the School Board in 1975, to become effective with the graduating class of 1978-79. Initially, the requirements were set at the eighth-grade level (8.5). They were later raised to the ninth-grade criterion (9.0), to become effective with the graduating class of 1982-83.

The School Board took a bold step in 1975 in establishing the minimum competency requirements. Austin was one of the first school districts in the nation to set such a policy. Later, after the criterion was raised to 9.0, a survey of other districts revealed the 9.0 requirement to be one of the highest in the nation.

While AISD was bold, the District was also prudent. Legal aspects of the policy were scrutinized, and legal challenges to similar policies elsewhere (in Florida in particular) were closely monitored. AISD's minimum competency program was revised and fine tuned to be as legally defensible as possible. (For example, Austin's BEST was locally developed to provide AISD with a minimum competency test measuring specifically those objectives adopted as minimum competencies.)

In eight years (1978-79 through 1985-86), 26,278 students graduated under the requirements. Of those graduates, 92.6% (24,318) met the minimum competency requirement in reading, 94.3% (24,780) met the requirement in mathematics, and 91.4% (24,012) met the requirements in both areas.

	1978-79		1979-80		1980-81		1981-82		1982-83*		1983-84*		1984-85*		1985-86*		TOTAL	
Number of Graduates Who...	3391	100%	3386	100%	3322	100%	3233	100%	3408	100%	3152	100%	3191	100%	3195	100%	26278	100%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in Both Areas	3204	94%	3186	94%	3119	94%	2908	90%	3010	88%	2832	90%	2882	90%	2871	90%	24012	91%
Signed at Least One Letter	119	4%	126	4%	122	4%	191	6%	254	8%	186	6%	210	7%	216	7%	1424	5%
Used at Least One Sp. Ed. Exemption	68	2%	74	2%	81	2%	134	4%	146	4%	135	4%	99	3%	111	3%	848	3%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in Reading	3260	96%	3214	95%	3148	95%	2960	92%	3046	89%	2862	91%	2910	91%	2918	91%	24318	93%
Signed a Letter in Reading	63	2%	102	3%	94	3%	148	5%	222	7%	162	5%	186	6%	172	5%	1149	4%
Used a Sp. Ed. Exemption in Reading	68	2%	70	2%	80	2%	125	4%	140	4%	128	4%	95	3%	105	3%	811	3%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in Mathematics	3277	97%	3249	96%	3177	96%	3018	93%	3162	93%	2941	93%	2979	93%	2976	93%	24780	94%
Signed a Letter in Mathematics	46	1%	66	2%	67	2%	91	3%	105	3%	83	3%	117	4%	115	4%	690	3%
Used a Sp. Ed. Exemption in Mathematics	68	2%	71	2%	78	2%	124	4%	141	4%	128	4%	95	3%	104	3%	809	3%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in at Least One Area	3285	97%	3277	97%	3206	97%	3070	95%	3196	94%	2971	94%	3007	94%	3020	95%	25032	95%
Signed a Letter in Both Areas	38	1%	42	1%	39	1%	48	1%	73	2%	59	2%	93	3%	71	2%	463	2%
Used a Sp. Ed. Exemption in Both Areas	68	2%	67	2%	77	2%	115	4%	137	4%	121	4%	91	3%	101	3%	777	3%

*1982-83 and later graduates had to meet a 9.0 grade-equivalent criterion, compared to 8.5 for prior years.

Note: Some graduates were sp. ed. exempt in one area and signed a letter in the other area; consequently, the data may not add up exactly.
Letter data for 1978-79 and 1979-80 also include graduates who were exempt due to being enrolled prior to 1975-76 or transferring into as a senior.

Figure 6. COMPETENCY STATUS OF GRADUATES, 1978-79 THROUGH 1985-86.

Bibliography

Related Publications

Achievement in AISD: 1975 through 1985. Austin, Tx.: Office of Research and Evaluation (Pub. No. 85.24), Austin Independent School District, October 1985.

This publication summarizes AISD achievement in reading and mathematics by ethnicity from 1975 through 1985.

Minimum competency testing: Helpful or harmful to high level skills? Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California, April 1986. (Pub. No. 85.50)

This paper examines the effect of a minimum competency testing program on high- and low-achieving students, and related issues.

SYSTEMWIDE TESTING: 1985-86 evaluation plan. In Evaluation plans 1985-86. Austin, Tx.: Office of Research and Evaluation (Pub. No. 85.16), Austin Independent School District, September 1985.

The systemwide testing evaluation plan for 1985-86 is included with all other ORE 1985-86 plans.

SYSTEMWIDE EVALUATION: 1985-86 technical report. Austin, Tx.: Office of Research and Evaluation (Pub. No. 85.66), Austin Independent School District, July 1986.

The technical report describes in detail all aspects of the annual districtwide achievement test administrations.

The Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) report, 1985-86. Austin, Tx: Office of Research and Evaluation (Pub. No. 85.59), Austin Independent School District, July 1986.

This report summarizes the results of the first administration of the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS), a statewide basic skills test for students in grades 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11-12 (exit level).

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